

NĀTYA - THE DEŚĪ YAJÑA

Nātya

I. Introductory

मुभान्नुभविक्ल्पकः..... नाट्यवेदो मयाकृतः

The *nātyaveda* was composed by me so that it would apportion good and bad luck<sup>1</sup>.

With these words Brahmā silences the indignant Virūpākṣa, explaining him the true nature of *nātya*, its universal relevance, its aim and its validity:

A performance of *nātya* reveals the state-of-being of the three worlds (NŚ I. 106), it serves as a method of instruction, it supports this world and it maintains 'the codes of eternity' (*dharma*) (NŚ I. 108-115). Brahmā advises all gods to engage themselves in *nātya*; they will enjoy worship that brings them good luck (*śubham*) when they descend through *nātya* in the world of mortals (*martyalokagataḥ*, NŚ I. 124). However, great care has to be taken in preparing the pavillion (*maṇḍapa*) and stage (*raṅga*) of the *nātya*-performance. Once everything has been ritually consecrated, the performance attains the same validity as the (Vedic) *yajña* ritual (NŚ I. 126). Not only the gods who descend in *nātya* enjoy *śubham*, the organiser and performer of the ritual will enjoy good luck, happiness (*śubham*) and wealth (*artha*) as well; finally, they will even reach heaven.

Still, inspite of these claims of validity and the lofty term *nātyaveda*, this Veda, this 'science', is different from the four original Vedas.

Why and how?

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1. The full text of the *śloka* is as follows: *bhavatām daivatānām śubhāśubhavi-kalpakaḥ karmabhāvanvayāpekṣo nātyavedo mayā kṛtaḥ* NŚ I. 105.

Bharatamuni provides the answer. Brahmā himself instructed this legendary sage in *nāṭyaveda* and requested him to practice it with the help of his one hundred sons. Other sages — who were in full control of their sensory organs and intellect — approached Bharata(muni) with crucial questions concerning the origin, purpose, operating principles and application of this particular science (*veda*). Bharata expounded his knowledge in the form of a collection of practical guidelines: the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In the first chapter (*Nṣ* I 7ff) he reveals the origin and purpose of this applied science:

From the onset of the silver age people became characterised by the codes of village life (*grāmya-dharma*); passions like lust, greed, power, joy, anger etc. created the experience of well-being (*sukha*) and unhappiness (*dukha*). The gods kind of 'lost contact' because the people following the sensuous *grāmya-dharma* were not allowed to either recite or hear the four original Vedas. So, the gods, too, wanted to sway with emotion and sensuous experience. They asked Brahmā to create some form of play (*kṛdāniya*) that would engage both the eye and the ear. Only in this way communication could be restored. Brahmā went into deep concentration (*yoga*), distilled the sensory essence from the four existing Vedas, and 'processed' it into a fifth Veda: the Veda of *nāṭya*, or — in other words — knowledge concretely represented and experienced through the senses. *Nāṭya* relates the state-of-being (*bhāvānukīrtana*) of the three worlds (*trailoka*), their interrelatedness (*sūtra*) by presenting it concretely in performance (*prayoga*).

If we manage to divest Bharata's statements of their mythical vocabulary, we can see a semiotician at work whose sharp and detailed observations could easily join in the discussions held by XX-th century semioticians.

For instance, according to Bharata, *nāṭya* relates the state-of-being of the three worlds. This definition of the content of the *nāṭya*-performance seems remarkably close to the notions of the Soviet semiotician Lotman; according to him, the literary text (in the case of *nāṭya*: the performance text) conveys a «model of the world» (*model' mira*)<sup>2</sup>.

Which world?

The objective truth-value of such text is not investigated.

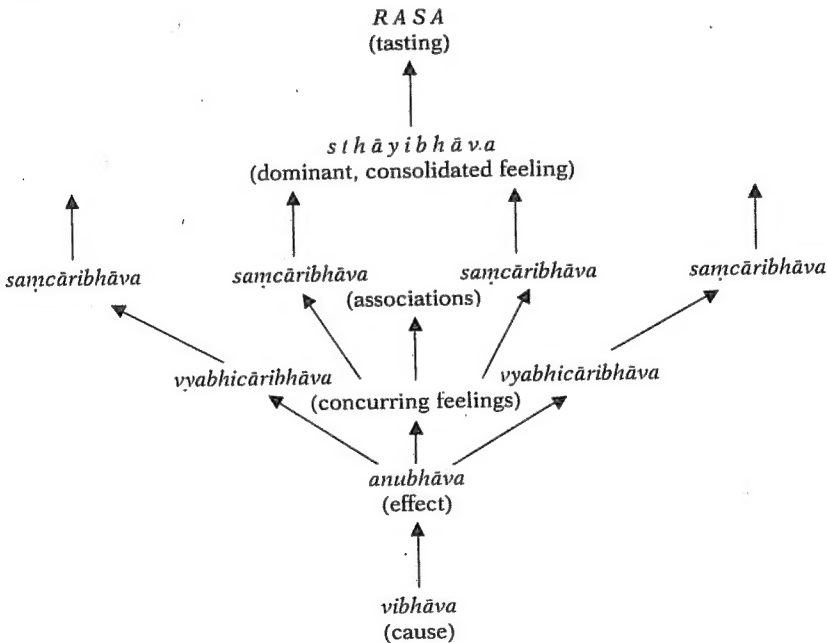
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2. Cf. D.W. FOKKEMA, E. KUNNE-IBSCH, *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century*, London 1977, p. 46. These and the following passages have been taken from the chapter 'Soviet Semiotics', pp. 38-46, and from 'Concluding Remarks', pp. 46-49.

«Critical truth», to which we will return later in the context of success in dramatic performance, lies outside semiotic appreciation; what matters is intensified perception; in the terminology of Bharata this aim is expressed as *rasa* 'tasting': the ultimate, cumulative impact of performance. While Lotman holds that this intensified perception is generated by a consistently structured «aesthetics of identity», Bharata outlines a dynamics of aesthetic experience that is too well-known to be presented before this audience<sup>3</sup>.

In the study of literary history, Lotman argues, one should

3. The aesthetic process is imagined to develop from extraneous causes which address the subconscious and which increase their impact by added complementary feelings, associations and imageries: these result in a dominant mood which is formed in the conscious and which culminates in sensing an all-encompassing *rasa*. This process can be imagined thus:



Note that all terms indicate a dynamism of affectation as they are all derived from the root *bhū* — 'to become'.

distinguish between «the aesthetics of identity» (*estetika toždestva*) and «the aesthetics of opposition» (*estetika protivopostagvlenija*). The first is characteristic to folklore, the (European) Middle Ages and Classicism, to which one could add the ancient Asiatic cultures. The «aesthetics of opposition» is typical for Romanticism, Realism and Avant-garde. The «aesthetics of identity» presupposed the identity or near-identity of the code of the sender with that of the receiver. Acquaintance with the codes of the sender is an absolute prerequisite for the ideal spectator. NŚ Ch. XXVII 50-62 outlines the characteristics of the real *rasika* 'taster' of a performance as well as the different types of audience and the topic of *nāṭya* suitable to them<sup>4</sup>.

According to Lotman, the aesthetics of identity can prevail only in cultures of a specific type which need (or are told to need) a centripetal force, a focus rather than the centrifugal individualizing tendencies of modern art. His explanation of the aesthetic text shows that it yields a maximum of information and emancipates art from being a by-product of culture; it restores it to a central position. Similarly, *nāṭya*, is far from a by-product in the world of *grāmyadharmā* (village life): the very fate of the gods and anti-gods is determined by its performance<sup>5</sup>. As Lotman argues, even computer engineers should learn from the way information is stored in art; the sages, colleagues of Bharata, ask the very same questions: «from where is the information derived, to what purpose, how is it stored, which are the guiding principles, and, how is it to be applied»<sup>6</sup>. The performance of *nāṭya* (< *naṭ*- to dance, to

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4. From: translation by M. GHOSH, *Nāṭyaśāstra* Ch. XXVII 50-55, description of the ideal spectator: «Those who are possessed of (good) character, high birth, quiet behaviour and learning, are desirous of fame, virtue, are impartial, advanced in age, proficient in drama in all its six limbs, alert, honest, unaffected by passion, expert in playing the four kinds of musical instruments, very virtuous, acquainted with the Costumes and Make-up, the rules of dialects, the four Histrionic Representations, grammar, prosody, and various (other) *Śāstras*, are experts in different arts and crafts, and have fine sense of the Sentiments and the Psychological States, should be made spectators in titnessing a drama. Anyone who has (lit. is characterized by) unruffled senses, is honest, expert in discussion of pros and cons, detector of faults and appreciator of merits, is considered fit to be a spectator in a drama (*nāṭya*)».

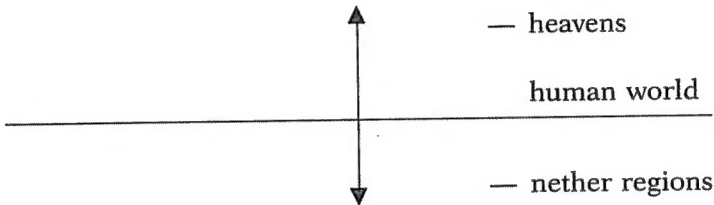
5. Cf. NŚ I. 105, and note 1.

6. NŚ I 4-5: *katham, kasya, katyāṅgaḥ, kimpramāṇas, prayoga*.

represent anything, perform, imitate) requires exact, detailed awareness of the identity and the interrelatedness of the characters to be portrayed. The total sum of knowledge (*veda*) takes concrete shape at the momento of performance.

## II. Method and structure of nāṭya

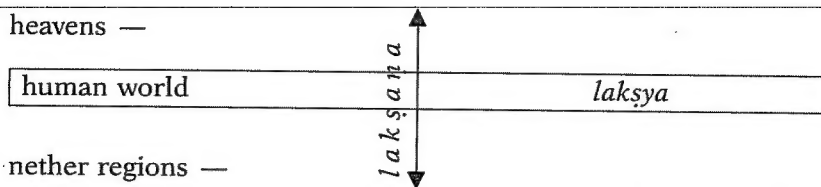
Taking the notion of an «aesthetics of identity» as a point of departure, we should try to discern the focus of its centripetal force. As outlined above we should understand *nāṭya* as a message informing us about the state-of-being of the three worlds: the nether regions, the human world and the heavens. These worlds do not exist in isolation, they should rather be considered a *continuum* containing three fases:



Graph 1: the three worlds

The gods and other divine forces do not restrict their influence to their 'home-region'; their power is in a *flux* and can be felt at any moment and place in human existence. Therefore it is of utmost importance to identify all possible forces, their character, their power and effect in order to keep them in check and harmonise them with human happiness and prosperity.

The method to achieve this 'cosmic balance', to harmonise the three worlds in accordance with human *śubham* (well-being, good luck) has been laid out by experts both in theory (*śāstra*: textual and orally transmitted traditional rules) and practice (*prāyoga*). The crucial nexus in this method is the knowledge of *a.* correct diagnosis of the forces at work (*lakṣaṇa*), and *b.* correct application (*lakṣya*). Graphically represented:



Graphs 2: science of the three worlds

## IIa. Method

By applying the correct markers (*lakṣaṇa*), the marked (*lakṣya*) becomes the divine force, god or goddess that is needed to harmonise the human world. Performance becomes in fact incarnation. This seems to be the true meaning of *nāṭya*: incarnation of the character to be performed; not portrayal but becoming<sup>7</sup>. The gods indeed descend into the world of mortals (*martyalokagataḥ*, NŚ I. 124) and enjoy worship by humans. As pointed out before, the conditions under which *nāṭya* can take place must be meticulously arranged and protected. Any fault (*doṣa*) might cause great danger instead of well-being; every facet of the performance is effective: the stage, the text, the diction, the music and dances, the musical instruments, the mental preparation of the performer, his make-up and costume, the process of identification with the character that takes place in the green room (*nepathya*) — all are decisive in the effort to achieve harmony between the three worlds, and all are charged with divinity.

## IIb. Structure

It might be possible to set up a basic structure of *nāṭya*. Within this structure variations are determined by the «divine filler» and the «occasion for performance».

- I. Preparing the locus and platform for performance;
- II. Preliminary rites:
  - a. propitiatory rites
  - b. identificatory rites;

7. Cf. NŚ XIII 82-86, discussed in this paper under II.b.2: effective mental preparation.

III. Performance proper - transformatory process;

IV. Withdrawal rites and purificatory rites.

By this procedure the 'divine' is gradually drawn in and fixed into the mundane, human world; there it is 'processed' to fit human prosperity and ultimately again released.

### I. *Preparing the locus and platform for performance*

These rites have been described in great detail in the second and third chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Only when the stage (*raṅga*) and the gods (*devatā*) that reside there have been worshipped (*pūjanam*) in the prescribed manner, well-being (*śubham*) will be generated for the king, the town, the country and the people (NŚ III, 93-4). Moreover, the act of worshipping the gods of the stage equals the prestigious Vedic sacrifice (*yajñena samitam hyetat raṅgagadāivatapūjanam*, NŚ III, 96).

### II. *Preliminary rites*

#### a. Propitiatory rites

According to NŚ V, 177 'nothing burns as quickly as a wrongly staged production (*apaprayogastu prayukto*)'. Therefore a great number of propitiatory rites (*pūrvarāṅga*) are to be performed. The extremely elaborate details are found in *Nāṭyaśāstra* Ch. IV and V.

#### b. Identificatory rites

The process of identification with the characters to be staged is crucial in the production of a dramatic performance. Anyone who wishes to obtain *śubham* (well-being) should follow the rules of *ahāryābhinaya* (representation through costume and make-up, NŚ XXIII 1-3) scrupulously. The process of identification is marked by three important proficiencies: 1. ritual skills in preparing and applying the suitable costumes and make-up, 2. effective mental preparation, 3. knowledge of characters that are suitable for impersonation and of those that are not.

#### 1. Ritual skills in preparing and applying suitable costumes and make-up

Up to this day the green-room is considered to be a place of

ritual importance. The stone onto which the paste for make-up is prepared is worshipped before its use<sup>8</sup>. The green-room (*nepathya*) is, in fact, the *garbha-gr̥ha* (womb-house) of the theatre. Therefore it is no wonder that the *ahāryābhinaya* (representation through costume and make-up) is regarded as crucially important. The entire production (*prayoga*) depends on it (*tasmin pratiṣṭhitāḥ*, NŚ XXIII, 1). It is in the green-room that the characters are shaped (*prakṛtayāḥ*) and given their direction (*sūcitāḥ*); hereafter, they enter without effort into their concrete manifestation by means of their physical features, limbs etc. (*aṅgādibhir abhivyaktim upagacchanti ayatnataḥ*, NŚ XXIII, 3).

*Nāṭyaśāstra* XXIII 4-81 gives information about the types of material to be used in 'shaping' a character as well as the technical details of their preparation.

## 2. Effective mental preparation

After stating the three materials by which a character is given shape (i.e. make-up paste, ornaments and painting of the limbs), Bharata lists a fourth element: the process of bringing the character to life. This process is described in *Nāṭyaśāstra* XXIII 82-86: by application of the *dharma* (code) of *nāṭya* the shaping of a character is brought about. The involvement of the actor is supposed to be total: «having shed one's own colour and *ātman* ('soul, life-principle') that form is to be made — by means of colours and costumes — of the character whose shape must be taken up. Just like a living being may transform into another body (and) another state of existence by taking recourse to the body of a *bhūta* (ghost)<sup>9</sup> after having shed his natural state of existence and himself, so a man should transform into the other state of existence once he is covered by paints and costume, of the character whose dress he wears».

8. Personal communication from Drs. Hanne de Bruijn who has been working for almost two years with *Terukkūttu* drama-troups in Tamilnadu.

9. The impersonation of a *bhūta* is a very current, traditional theme in South India as well as Sri Lanka. Cfr. especially, B. KAPFERER, *A Celebration of Demons, Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing* in Sri Lanka, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983.



Thus we see that the degree of identification with the character to be portrayed is total: the actor sheds his own natural colour, state of existence and even his life-principle (*ātman*) and enters his new existence like a deceased entering the body of a ghost. In this context *nāṭya* certainly does not mean mere 'play' or 'drama', it means impersonation, human incarnation almost to the extent of human sacrifice.

### 3. Character suitable for impersonation

The criterion in dividing the characters that can be impersonated and those that cannot be impersonated, is *prāṇa* (vital breath). Those who possess *prāṇa* (NŚ XXIII 86) belong to the *jīva-bandha* (group of the living). The *jīva-bandha* are: *devas*, *dānavas*, *gandharvas*, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, *pannagās*, gods, demigods, nymph-like beings, nature-gods, demons, but not the hills, palaces instruments shields, armours, banners and weapons. However, under certain circumstances the *nāṭyadharma* (codes of impersonation) may bestow *jīva* on them as well due to which they are supposed to be portrayed as those characters endowed with *prāṇa* (vital breath). This instance shows once more the belief in the actual transformatory power of the theatrical codes and their application.

### III. Performance proper - transformatory process

Chapter XXVII of *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes ten types of play. However, the best way to study the *process* of *nāṭya* in the sense of impersonation, or incarnation, is to witness performances of the type of *Terukkūttu*, *Cāmiyāṭṭam* or similar forms belonging to Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, or, *Tēyyam* and *Bhūta* dances performed in Kerala and Karnataka<sup>10</sup> In these traditions the actor should become a vessel (*pātra*) that contains the story of the god, hero or of the deceased person whom he impersonates. Usually, the performance takes place in front of the shrine or the particular *Tēyyam* or *Bhūta*, and it may last from fifteen minutes to twelve

10. Cf. BALAN NAMBIAR, *Gods and Ghosts, teyyam and bhuta rituals*, in: *Mārg*, Vol. XXXIV No. 3, pp. 63-75.

hours. The texts and songs that form the base of these performances are transmitted orally from generation to generation, while the composition of new songs has been a continuous process according to the need of the village people<sup>11</sup>.

In trying to understand and classify Indian cultural phenomena one should always keep in mind the dual mode of transmission: *mārga* (Skt. 'road', indicating the 'officially' accepted norms, usually codified in literary treatises) and *deśi* (Skt. 'regional', indicating the logically prevalent norms, usually orally transmitted). In other words, experts should follow both what is *śāstrācāra* (proper according to normative manuals) and that which is *lokācāra* (proper according to the customs followed in this world). Therefore, Bharata advises to follow the oral traditions in those matters which have not been described by him in his *śāstra* (NŚ XXIII, 223 *noktāni va mayā yaṇi lokagrahāṇi tānyapi*).

#### IV. Withdrawal rites and purificatory rites

Everything connected with the performance is considered to be more 'powerful' after concluding the plot. This 'extra power' is both wished for and feared at the same time. On the one hand the rice and turmeric powder that have been used in the course of the performance are distributed to the public, on the other hand, the costumes (especially the crown) have to be returned to the shrine<sup>12</sup>; many offertory objects will be destroyed by dissolving them in water, burning or burying them<sup>13</sup>. The actors will have to undergo ceremonies like *dr̥ṣṭiparihāra* (removal of evil, envious eye) and several ablutions. However, these rituals should be studied in much more details in the field.

Bharata does not mention detailed procedure of such a purificatory ritual. His only advice is that at the conclusion of a *nāṭya*, the *prāśnikas* ('those with questions' arbitrators) should effect

11. Cf. Dr. K.K.N. KURUP, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala*, Calcutta, 1973.

12. K.K.N. KURUP, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

13. BALAN NAMBIAR, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

*nālikasiddhi* (the power of a *nālika*, i.e. the time-span of 24 minutes) and *lekhyasiddhi* (the power of 'inscribing, draing, painting'). Hereafter the banner (*jarjara*) which is an object of central importance, is removed. In other words, a moment must be diagnosed which is of absolutely ritually safe nature (*nālikasiddhi*); at that point the divine characters that have been inscribed in the soil during the *pūrvaraṅga* rites and that have been painted onto the actors (*lekhyasiddhi*) are requested to find their way back to their own realms in the threefold world.

### *Syntax of nāṭya*

<sup>1</sup> *Nāṭyaveda* and its literary reflection *Nāṭyaśāstra* were created to tell of the conceptual universe (*trailokya bhāvānukīrtana*) of the people following the codes of village life (*grāmyadharmā*). These codes differ from the followers and exponents of the four original Vedas. The handbook for the method of *nāṭya* is not exhaustive: those matters which it does not describe must be taken from the living tradition (*NS̐ XXIII 223 noktāni va mayā yāni lokagrahāṇi tānyapi*). How should we imagine this living tradition to be, which was so different that it had to receive its own *Veda*: what did it look like, in which language did it express itself?

According to modern theories of the reception of literature and the study of literary texts «the historical and cultural reality which we call the «literary work» is not exhausted in the text. The text is only one of the elements of a relation. In fact, the literary work consists of the text (the system of intra-textual relations) in its relation to the extra-textual reality: to literary norms, tradition and the imagination<sup>14</sup>. The reality behind a text like *Nāṭyaśāstra* is indeed a complex web of textual and non-textual relations. Bharata based his «field-work» on living traditions rooted in a conceptual universe that differed greatly from the Vedic, and, that had not yet received any literary treatment. Therefore we are posed before the almost unsolvable problem of checking the conceptual universe of an oral, most probably non-Sanskritic tradition against its literate description in Sanskrit. Following Sapir we may

14. Cf. D.W. FOKKEMA, E. KUNNE-IBSCH, op. cit., p. 137.

assume that 'we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation'<sup>15</sup>.

In trying to understand the syntax of *nāṭya yajña* we will have to investigate the syntax of the language in which the living (oral) tradition expressed itself.

Where can we look for the linguistic data of that extra-Aryan/Vedic universe? The only candidate seems to be Tamil. Tamil represents the pre-Aryan speakers of Dravidian who settled in India during the 4th millenium<sup>16</sup>. Contemporaneous with *Nāṭyaśāstra* it produced a grammar (*Tolkāppiyam*) and bardic literature (*Caṅkam*), datable from ca. 200 B.C.-300 A.D. By 450 A.D. we encounter a full-fledged dramatic tradition in the 'epic' *Cilappatikāram*. This indicates that, inspite of the later development of literacy in Tamil culture, the living tradition was very actively engaged in the performing arts such as described by Bharata. Therefore, for the sake of argument and comparison, let us look at the syntax of Tamil — the oldest branch of the Dravidian, pre-Aryan language family — as generative force for the syntax of action in the *nāṭya* ritual. In this primacy of language over action we follow Whorf who stresses that «a certain line of behavior is often given by the analogies of the linguistic formula in which the situation is spoken of, and by which to some degree it is analysed, classified, and allotted its place in that world which is 'to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group'»<sup>17</sup>. Lotman argues similarly that language is a «modelling system» (*modeliruješčajy sistema*)<sup>18</sup>.

How does Tamil syntax model the conceptual universe (*trailokya*) of the people following village codes of life (*grāmyadharmā*) for, and, on the basis of whom the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was written?

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15. ADAMS, PARVEEN, ed., *Language in Thinking*, Penguin modern psychology readings, 1972, p. 123.

16. K.V. ZVELEBIL, *Dravidian Languages*, in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1974, p. 989ff.

17. ADAMS, P., *op. cit.*, p. 126.

18. D.V. FOKKEMA, E. KUNNE IBSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

In contrast to what Whorf calls Standard Average European (SAE) which we may extend to Indo-European languages and which are characterised by a concept of time that knows three definite tenses: past, present and future, Dravidian languages — here, Tamil in particular — measured time originally according to two categories: achieved and non-achieved.

The aspect of syntax which seems particularly relevant to me in studying the syntax of *nāṭya*, is the category of tense. According to Whorf concepts of 'time' and 'matter' are not given in substantially the same form by experience to all men but depend upon the nature of the language or languages through the use of which they have been developed. The three-tense system of SAE colors all our thinking about time. (...)

Imagination of time as a row harmonizes with a system of THREE tenses; whereas a system of TWO, an earlier and a later, would seem to correspond better to the feeling of duration as it is experienced. For if we inspect consciousness we find no past, present, future, but a unity embracing complexity. *Everything* is in consciousness, and everything in consciousness IS, and is together. There is in it a sensuous and a non-sensuous. We may call the sensuous — what we are seeing, hearing, touching — the *present* while in the non-sensuous the vast image-world of memory is being labeled the *past* and another realm of belief, intuition and uncertainty the *future*<sup>19</sup>.

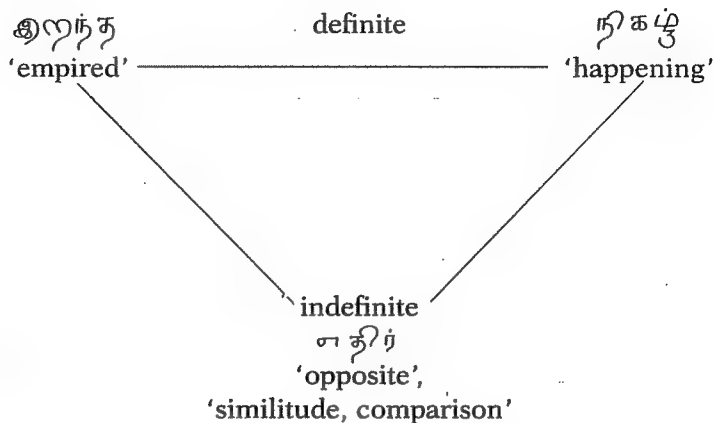
This more or less exactly describes the situation of Tamil. The oldest data available to us with regard to Tamil reveal only two tenses: the accomplished and the un-accomplished. That is, in Old Tamil there was a past perfect which denoted past tense and perfective aspect, and an aorist future, denoting the present and the future tenses and, usually, a habitual or atemporal action or state. The advent of the present tense marker is historically attested in *Cilappatikāram* (ca. 450 A.D.)<sup>20</sup>. However, syntactically, the future tense never attains a definite nature. Among the three tenses only

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19. ADAMS, P., *op. cit.*, p. 133.

20. K.V. ZVELEBIL, *The Present Tense Morph in Tamil*, JAOS, Vol. 91, No. 3, 1971, pp. 442-7445.

two are definite: the past and the present whereas the future is a *futurum generalis*, a *potentialis*, a *habitual present*:



Relating the syntax of the Tamil tense-system to the syntax of *nāṭya* we may describe *nāṭya* as 'the effort' to transform the non-sensuous indefinite into the definite sensuous, happening present by joining the definite knowledge derived from the past-experience with the ever-present, available similitude of the indefinite.

We will pursue this line of thought through the semantics and semiotic dynamics of the *nāṭya*-ritual.

### *Semantics of nāṭya*

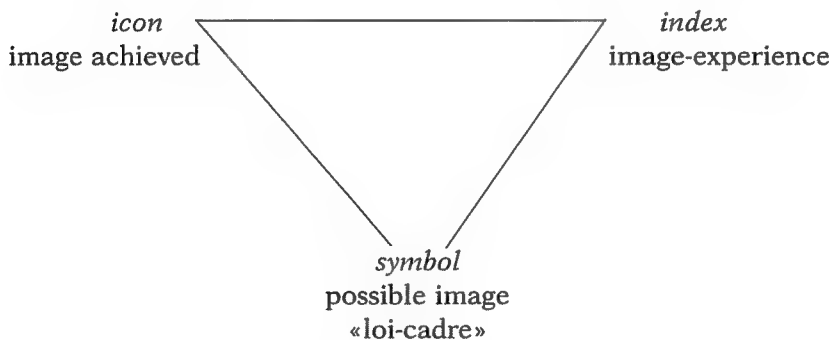
According to Roman Jakobson the semiotic sign-system expressed by Charles Sanders Peirce touches upon the most essential and fertile question of the relationship between language and time<sup>21</sup>. In his system of three types of signs, Peirce distinguishes on the one hand the *index* and the *icon*, which he considers to operate both as definite *facts* in the relationship between marker and marked. On the other hand he distinguishes a third type of sign:

21. R. JAKOBSON, K. POMORSKA, *Dialogues*, Flammarion, Paris, 1980, pp. 91-92.

the *symbol* which he considers to function not as a definite face (unlike the *index* and *icon*), but as a convention or prescription between marker and marked. In the words of Jakobson: «A l'opposé de l'indice comme de l'icône, suivant la théorie de Peirce, le symbole n'est pas un objet, mais seulement une loi-cadre qui donne lieu à différentes applications contextuelles de fait, les occurrences». In the Indian context the term 'loi-cadre' a cadre of lawfulness, of permissible usage, seems meaningful. According to Jakobson it is clear that this «loi-cadre» is nothing else than a condition for all future replicas to take shape.

In his reflexions upon the relationship between the three categories of signs and the categories of time, Peirce regards the *icon* as a completed image of a past experience, whereas the *index* is involved in the actual moment of experience. The symbol — which is rooted in a generally accepted meaning — belongs to the realm of the *futurum indefinitum*, an *esse in futuro*, a 'law' which can never be achieved fully but remains more of a *potentialis*. The symbol gives us the impression that we can experience the future in the present and thereby predict it.

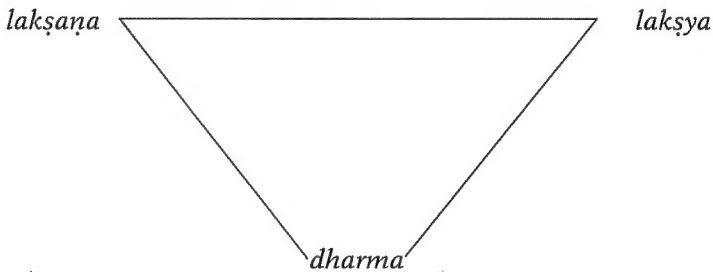
The Peircian semiotic triad can be represented as follows:



Returning to the Tamil tense system we encountered the past tense — *iranta* 'expired' — and the present tense — *nikal* 'happening, taking place' — as definite tenses to be understood as facts. The future tense, however is no future in our SAE sense at all; the term employed indicates the indefinite potentialis of the symbol:

*etir* meaning 'opposite' means also 'similitude, comparison', it resembles the «loi-cadre» from which one can draw images into the moment of experience. The past and present are definite tenses by virtue of our direct experience of their past and present reality; the symbol, however, in the store-house of our reflexion upon that reality. As Peirce maintains: we have direct experience of reality but indirect knowledge of it. Reality bumps up against us, impinges upon us, yet until we have found a way a representing that reality, it remains impervious to thought. In fact, only those portions of reality which are capable of being represented can effect us. If representations provide us with our only access to reality, then the authenticity of those representations becomes an issue of pressing importance<sup>22</sup>.

It is this pressing importance which lies behind the precise knowledge and the precise method of application prescribed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Reality gained the status of truth only by being represented, by being drawn in the moment of actual experience through the eye and they ear (*NŚ* I 77). The people of the *grāmya-dharma* could not savour another type of 'truth'. The descent of the gods into their world of human experience (*martyalokagataḥ*, *NŚ* I. 124) was full of dangers but if properly executed, it resulted in *śubham* (well-being, good-luck) for both gods and humans. The method has been discussed before and can be represented by means of a similar triad:



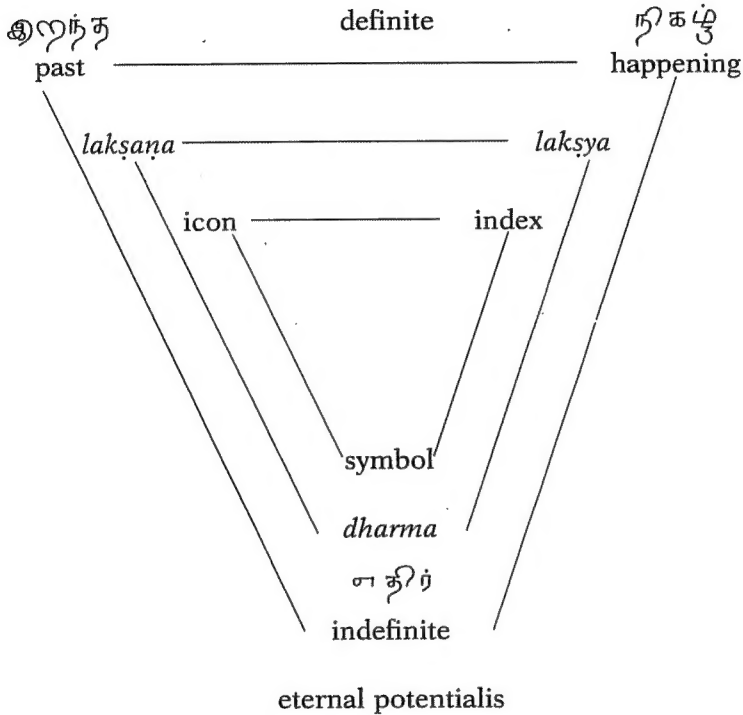

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22. K. SILVERMAN, *The Subject of Semiotics*, Oxford University Press New York, 1983, pp. 14-25.

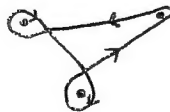


In the terminology of Peirce *nāṭya* can be seen as the effort to represent the codes of eternity (*dharma*) and make them accessible to our senses by applying their markers (*lakṣaṇas*) to the meaningfully marked human existence (*lakṣya*).

The full meaning of the syntax and semantics of *nāṭya* can now be represented thus:



its process:



## *In conclusion*

### 1. *Aim*

The 'movement' of the process of *nāṭya* can be described as the 'transformation of the non-sensuous potentialis into the sensuous experience of present by means of identificatory application of definite experience in the past to the ever-indefinite, thus drawing it into the realm of the definite'. In this way the impression is created of sensing the unknown future, and, one step further to predict it and even influence it. Such effort is good for the performer, but not only for him, it supports the coherence of the universe: it leads to *śubham* good-luck and well being for the organiser, the actor, the gods, the king, the country and maintains in general the *dharma*. Bharata expresses the aim of *nāṭya(veda)* as follows: *śubhāśubhavikalpakah* 'as a means to allot good and bad luck'.

### 2. *Validity*

Although the approach of the *nāṭyaveda* differs from the other four Vedas in the fact that it stresses the importance of concrete representation of reality, accessible to sensory experience, the process of *nāṭya* — if meticulously executed — is *yajñena samitan* (NŚ III, 96) as valid as the (Vedic) *yajña*.

### 3. *Success*

Bharata would entirely agree with Peirce that 'if representation provides us with our only access to reality, then the authenticity of those representations becomes an issue of pressing importance'. And indeed, according to NŚ V, 177 'nothing burns as quickly as a wrongly staged production (*apaprayogastu prayukto*). The dangers involved in a *nāṭya* performance are not small: they may arise from the gods (who are known to be jealous), from the 'soul' (*ātman* 'life principle') of the actors, from enemies, and, from unforeseen calamities. These warnings form part of NŚ chapter XXVII that is entirely dedicated to success. Bharata's formulation of 'success in *nāṭya*' is *siddhivyañjaka* 'the making manifest

of power'. Success is of two types: *mānuṣī* 'human', expressed by smiles, praising words etc., and, *daiviki* 'divine'. *Daivikī siddhi* (divine success, or 'divine power') is recognizable by an excess of *sattva*: being-ness, aligned-ness with that reality that is both mundane and divine; it is expressed through the presence, limbs and involved mimic representation of the actor. This involvement is experienced by the public in spontaneous goose-flesh, shivering, tears etc.<sup>23</sup>.

In other words, divine success is that type of 'power' that is capable of transforming the non-sensuous, indefinite into a sensuous, definite experience. It is the experience of existence in its eternal aspect. In this context the Tamil term for 'truth' gains special importance: 'truth' to the Tamil is *mey* meaning 'truth' as well as 'body'.

*Nāṭya* is the uncompromising effort to make reality *felt*. It operates on the basis of a semiotic dynamics of meaning and time, embedded in a specific model of the universe. It can realise two types of truth: the semiotic 'third' truth which remains within the sphere of human codes and appreciation<sup>24</sup>, or, an existential, divine truth, which touches upon the very essence of eternity by making it felt here-and-now.

In this way well-being can be established in the world of mortals: an eternal category tailored to human, temporary needs.

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23. NŚ XXIV 1-3: *sāmānyābhīnayo nāma jñeyo vāgaṅgasattvajāḥ  
sattve kāryaḥ prayatnastu nāṭyam sattve pratiṣṭhitam /1/  
sattvātirikto' bhīnayo jyeṣṭha ityabhidhīyate  
samāsattvo bhāvenmadhyaḥ sattvahino' dhīma smṛtaḥ /2/  
avyaktarūpam sattvam hi vijñeyam bhāvasaṁśrayam  
yathāśīhānarasopetaṁ romāṇcaṣṛādhībhīrguṇaḥ /3/*

«General *abhinaya* is known to be born from words, limbs and *sattva*; towards *sattva* special effort should be made, since *nāṭya* is rooted in *sattva*. *Abhinaya* rich in *sattva* is considered best, with a *sattva* that is flat middle; *abhinaya* without *sattva* is known to be worst. *Sattva* is considered to be of unmanifest shape and the support of *bhāva* and to be accompanied according to place and *rasa* by *guṇa*'s like thrill of hair, tears etc.».

NŚ XXIV 16: *sa sattvātīśayā jñeyā bhāvayuktā tathāiva ca  
nāṭye sampreṣṭakairjñeyā nīyam siddhistu daivikī /16/*

«that success is always recognized as divine which is known by the public at a performance as fused with *bhāva* and excelling in *sattva*».

24. D.W. FOKKEMA, E. KUNNE-IBSCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.